

interval house

TESTIMONY OF PENNI MICCA SUBMITTED TO HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

Tuesday March 13, 2012

Raised Bill No. 5453

AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Good afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Penni Micca. As a representative of Interval House, Connecticut's largest domestic violence intervention and prevention program, a member of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) Public Policy Committee, and Chair of the CCADV CT Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony pertaining to: An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Trauma-Informed Care.

The prevalence of traumatic stress in the lives of families experiencing domestic violence is extraordinarily high. Many of the families have experienced on-going trauma throughout their lives in the form of childhood abuse and neglect, and the trauma associated with poverty and the loss of home, safety and sense of security – in addition to domestic violence. These experiences have a significant impact on how people think, feel, behave, relate to others, and cope with future experiences. Families have learned to adapt to these traumatic circumstances in order to survive, but their ways of coping may seem confusing and out-of-place in their current circumstances.

Given the high rates of traumatic exposure among families who have experienced domestic violence, it is clear that understanding trauma and its impact is essential to providing quality care in domestic violence intervention and prevention programs. Domestic violence programs have been providing trauma informed service for many years. In order to respond empathically to the needs of trauma survivors, help ensure their physical and emotional safety, develop realistic goals, and at the very least avoid re-traumatization, we understand that all practices and programming must be provided through the lens of trauma.

Last year, H.B. 6053 addressed trauma as it relates to victims of domestic violence. Initially, Law enforcement and Family Violence Intervention Units were tasked with providing referrals to trauma care providers. The original proposal required that they must maintain referral information

concerning licensed professional counselors who are trained in providing trauma-informed care to pass on to victims of domestic violence. This placed an undue burden on the cop on the street and the court support service providers. Therefore, for the purposes of H.B. 6053, "trauma-informed care" was defined as services directed by a thorough understanding of the neurological, biological, psychological, and social effects of trauma and violence on the individual. CCADV and all eighteen member programs are trauma informed care providers. Domestic violence providers were then identified as the referral organization for law enforcement. This made perfect sense. Law enforcement – and court family violence intervention units could then make referrals to ONE program: their community domestic violence program, each of which maintains a list of appropriate services for victims of domestic violence and their families who are in need of those referrals. Other vital services can be provided as well such as assistance with safety planning and legal and community advocacy. It was a win-win solution.

We love the spirit of this year's Raised Bill No. 5453, however we have concerns.

- First and foremost, there is no fiscal note. It would be impossible to implement appropriately without additional funding.
- Secondly, it is unclear as to who will be monitoring the proposed changes. Who would be responsible for these new measures?
- And lastly, without additional funding, we would not be able to provide the enhanced training that would be necessary to move forward with these proposals.

CCADV has worked with Dr. Alice Forrester of the Clifford Beers Clinic to discuss creating a listing of agencies and counselors throughout Connecticut for distribution. To improve services, it is and will be important to focus on spreading awareness of CCADV and its member programs, as well as the wonderful child advocacy programs in our state. We would hope that once funds can be matched with the proposal for enhanced services, those proposals will once again be raised within the Connecticut General Assembly. We hope that can be soon, and that we will be part of that conversation. We fear that this raised bill as it stands would not be able to deliver on its promises and we cannot support it as written.

Thank you for the work you do, for supporting the work of domestic violence programs and for working so hard to improve the lives of victims of domestic violence – young and old.

Thank you for allowing me to this opportunity to speak to you.